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U. S. Foes in Puerto Rico Prepare 'Coup'

By BRUCE BLOSSAT

PRIVATE word from San Juan indicates that anti-American pro-independence elements in Puerto Rico may be building secret strength within the new Popular Democratic administration of Gov. Roberto Sanchez Valella.

One source says that these elements are now so well established that Gov. Sanchez is "very close to being their prisoner."

The potential significance of these reports far outweighs that of recent accounts which suggested that the tiny Independence party got a recruiting lift from wide Puerto Rican disenchantment over U. S. intervention in the Dominican Republic.

The impact of the Dominican affair is said to be real enough — but not of major consequence. Even in the unlikely event that the Independence party's numbers were doubled, they would still represent less than 6 per cent of the Puerto Rican electorate.

PROTEGE

Gov. Sanchez, who piled up more than 60 per cent of the vote in winning election on the moderate Popular Democratic ticket last autumn, was the personal choice of then Gov. Luis Munoz Marin, the widely revered architect of Puerto Rico's political and economic advances.

The party, long heavily dominant in island politics, is committed to maintenance and improvement of Puerto Rico's so-called commonwealth status. This is a hybrid allowing substantial autonomy but stopping well short of independence.

Gov. Sanchez, for 14 years Gov. Munoz' chief-of-staff as Secretary of State, was expected to follow his mentor's programs and policies, and this he has done in his first six months.

He has lived up to no other principal expectations.

Not once has he consulted with Gov. Munoz. His presumed desire to be his own man hardly seems to justify a total freeze-out. Furthermore, Gov. Sanchez has had virtually no dealings with the established Popular Democratic leaders in the Puerto Rican legislature.

Instead, the governor has made a series of appointments of young, independence-minded leftish Puerto Rican intellectuals, who form what is being called "The Group of 22." Their real leader is a 28-year-old Harvard graduate named Garcia Passalacqua, a special assistant to Gov. Sanchez.

Two cabinet members and one other top appointee are reliably reported to have served earlier as intimate advisers of Gilberto Concepcion de Gracia, head of the Independence Party. These three cannot be named here.

NO BASE

Since independence has only minor support on the island, "The Group of 22" has no political base. "In a test at the polls, they couldn't win a barrio (election district)," says one source.

Their position inside the governor's compound is, however, regarded with the deepest concern by Gov. Munoz and those few others who see what is happening.

At the moment there is no overt action. Even with the "embarrassed concern" felt by many Puerto Ricans over the Dominican matter, the political climate on the island is said to be largely unfavorable to major moves toward independence.

In fact, the generally futile recruiting noises made recently by the formal Independence party may have led the "independentistas" around Gov. Sanchez to retreat deeper into secrecy for a while—to avoid easy identity with a cause bound to fail if pursued openly.